

How hard is it to forgive? What is it like to be forgiven? (8 – 12 years)

Learning outcomes

Emerging

- Retell the story of the Prodigal Son, explain one meaning of the story
- Explain at least two aspects of the story and what they may symbolise

Expected

- Explain the story of the Prodigal Son through two different viewpoints
- Give an account of what the story tells readers about forgiveness
- Answer the question, with evidence; 'how hard is it to forgive? What is it like to be forgiven?'

Exceeding

- Make a connection between the story and modern examples of forgiveness

Key words and concepts

- **Parable:** a short story with something for people to think about in their own lives.
- **Prodigal:** wasteful, extravagant or foolish.
- **Forgiveness:** letting go of anger and resentment.
- **Redemption:** rescue from sin.
- **Reconciliation:** restoring of respect between people who have hurt one another.
- **Love:** affection, kindness, compassion.
- **Mercy:** forgiveness and kindness.
- **Jealousy:** negative thoughts of fear and resentment.
- **Selfishness:** personal concern regarded as higher than concern for other people.
- **Pride:** an inflated sense of personal importance.
- **Greed:** wanting more than is needed.
- **Parable:** this comes from the Greek, meaning comparison or analogy. Many Christians refer to the parables Jesus told as 'earthly stories with heavenly meanings'.
- **Redemption:** – this means to 'buy out' and originally meant buying freedom for a slave. For Christians it means that through dying on the cross, Jesus bought freedom from sin for all people.
- **Forgiveness:** – this means to give up resentment or to grant pardon. For Christians, it is an important idea – as people ask forgiveness from God for their wrong doings they are also expected to forgive

those who have done wrong to them.

- **Grace:** – the unconditional love which Christians believe God has for humans.
- **Reconciliation:** – the restoring of good relationships after a break up. For Christians, Jesus' death on the cross reconciled human beings to God.

Learning activities

This lesson planning is built around the story of the Prodigal Son from Luke 15: 11-32. Later in the learning process pupils will read this biblical text but start by introducing the story through a video or animation, or through a graphic bible. Your first task is therefore to locate the story of the Prodigal Son in a format suitable for your pupils.

- As preparation for watching the video ask pupils to complete the following stems:
 - The times I want my own way are when ...
 - I realise I've made a mistake when ...
 - It can be hard to say sorry when ...
 - It can be hard to forgive when ...
- Explain to the pupils that they are going to be watching a video about the story of the lost, or prodigal, son. Prodigal means wasteful, extravagant or foolish. This is a story Jesus told.
- Remind pupils that Jesus told parables as a way of helping people understand what God wants them to do with their lives. Some people say that parables are an earthly way of telling a heavenly story.
- Jesus had been telling a number of stories or parables to help people understand what God is like. Some of the people Jesus was talking to were tax collectors and sinners and others were important people in the Jewish community called scribes and Pharisees. They were not happy that Jesus was talking to sinners as well as to people who lived within the law.
- Ask each of the pupils to look at the video through the eyes of either the father, the 'good' son or the lost (prodigal) son.
- At the end of the video ask each pupil to spend a few minutes drawing a fortune graph. On a sheet of A4 the vertical axis is marked on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 is sad, worried, anxious and 10 is happy, exhilarated, joyful). The horizontal axis is marked 1 to 10 to represent different stages of the story. This shows what the character in the story was thinking or feeling at different stages in the story. Once pupils have completed the fortune graph ask them to compare notes, i.e., those who had looked at the story through the eyes of the father to talk together, the good son and the lost (prodigal) son groups to work together.
- Bring the groups together as a class and draw out the main themes of the pupils' findings. How do these compare with the findings from the question stems which the class did before watching the video? Who do the pupils think Jesus meant the characters in the story to represent? What might Jesus have wanted his followers to think about in their own lives? E.g. When might they have acted like the father? Are their times in peoples' lives when they might have acted like the good son and at other times like the lost (prodigal) son?

- What questions could pupils ask about the decisions which each of the characters in the parable made? What might have happened if the father had acted differently? What if the good son and the lost (prodigal) son had acted differently?
- Now read the story from the Bible (Luke 15: 11-32) with pupils.
- Divide the story into sections: the father giving his sons his fortune: the younger son leaving to explore the world: the hard times for the younger son: the homecoming. Ask pupils to work in pairs on one of the sections. Encourage them to discuss their ideas on the most interesting or puzzling aspects of their section of the story. What are the two or three things that they think are most important about this section of the story? Ask them to choose one key point to explain to the other groups – i.e. what the key point is and why it is significant.
- Ask pupils to think about a time when they have made a mistake and been forgiven. Ask them to create a paper chain. On one side of each paper chain, ask them to write the key words for what it felt like to be forgiven.
- Now ask pupils to think about a time when they have forgiven someone for something which has hurt them. How hard was it? What did it feel like? On another paper chain, ask them to write the key words for forgiving someone else. Is there a difference between the two types of paper chain? Create a wall display with the heading: 'The Forgiveness Project.'
- Ask pupils to research another Biblical reference on forgiveness: Colossians 3 v 13 'Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another'. Ask pupils to summarise the reference and think of two questions they would want to ask a Christian about the Biblical quotes.
- Ask pupils to create images in pairs representing 'forgiveness': and ask them to say how these images relate to the parable of the lost (prodigal) son.
- Consider some examples in the world today where forgiveness has made a difference. Ask pupils in groups to look at one of the following examples where the principles of forgiveness have been at the heart of the work:
 - Corrymeela
 - Foundation for peace
 - The Iona community
 - The Taizé community
 - Truth and reconciliation in South Africa
- Ask pupils to work in pairs to research one of the examples above. They should find out the answers to these questions: What is the main focus of the work in this organisation? Why does this organisation exist? Why would someone get involved in this organisation?

- As each group feeds back to the rest of the class, ask them to collect the main ideas on a grid:

Organisation	Similarities	Differences
Corrymeela		
Foundation for Peace		
The Iona Community		
Taizé Community		
The Truth and Reconciliation Commission		
The main things Christians would think is important about these organisations		
The most important thing we have learnt doing this research		

- Ask pupils to fill a backpack with heavy items which represent carrying heavy burdens e.g., resentment, hurt, bitterness, anger, revenge. Using examples from the accounts on the websites above, ask them to describe what it feels like to carry the heavy burden from the point of view of some of the people they have researched.
- Ask them to write a song/poem or create artwork which shows what it is like when that is removed. Make links to the idea of forgiveness.
- Final personal reflection:
 - This is what I set out to do ...
 - This is what I found hardest ...
 - This is what I learned from doing this work ...
 - If another group were going to explore this, they could also think about ... and this would make it even better: ...